

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2021

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
H-310, The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cartwright and Ranking Member Aderholt:

As you consider appropriations legislation for the coming year, we respectfully request robust funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill.

LSC helps military families and veterans, those affected by opioids and addiction, victims of natural disasters, domestic violence survivors, families with children, homeowners and renters, the disabled, the elderly, and many others across the country. Funding for legal aid promotes individual empowerment and self-reliance by giving people the tools and knowledge to navigate the civil court system to protect and exercise their rights.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 53.8 million Americans, or 16.7% of the U.S. population, qualified for legal assistance from LSC-funded programs. Far more will now qualify because of the sharp rise in unemployment. Based on LSC's Justice Gap Report, 86% of the civil legal problems of low-income Americans receive no assistance. The "justice gap" is the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs. The economic toll of COVID-19 will only exacerbate the justice gap. Funding for LSC is integral to the fair administration of justice and the rule of law.

For over 45 years, LSC and its grantees have been providing civil legal assistance to veterans. Every year, LSC grantees assist nearly 100,000 veterans and their families with a range of legal issues. LSC launched a national Veterans Task Force in 2020 to strengthen the role of civil legal aid organizations in providing assistance to veterans. In 2017, 71% of households with veterans or other military personnel reported experiencing a civil legal problem that year. While civil legal needs among them are prevalent, 88% of low-income veterans received inadequate or no assistance with their legal issues.

Previously, LSC released two reports outlining the results of a year-long study into the opioid epidemic and the impact of natural disasters on low-income communities. Legal aid organizations play a pivotal role in addressing the opioid crisis by partnering with health professionals, first responders, social services providers, and policymakers. LSC's Opioid Task Force's recommendations focus on fostering collaborative responses to the opioid epidemic. Furthermore, for decades LSC has mobilized a robust network of legal services organizations and national partners to serve disaster survivors. LSC's Disaster Task Force's recommendations include building a systematic, coordinated, and sustainable approach to

help low-income individuals, families, and communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster.

LSC conducted an analysis last summer on the estimated cost for grantees to address the surge in evictions across the nation. Over 5 million LSC income-eligible households experienced rental shortfalls and potentially faced eviction during August 2020. LSC reported that the near-term dollar amount to address the legal needs of this surge was over \$2.5 billion. As states and localities continue lifting rent moratoriums, low-income people will increasingly rely on legal aid to help them through the eviction process.

Pro bono assistance is dependent on partnerships with LSC-funded legal aid organizations. Every year, private attorneys provide millions of hours of free legal services to individuals in need. Although pro bono volunteers cannot replace the work of legal aid lawyers, the private bar and others provide a critical resource to address the civil legal needs of low-income Americans.

At the 40th anniversary celebration of the establishment of LSC, late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia remarked, "Equal treatment is the element of justice most fundamental... denial of access to professional legal assistance is denial of equal justice." This sentiment has been echoed by major business leaders, private law firms, bipartisan state attorneys general, and Chief Justices of state courts who have advocated for robust LSC funding.

We hope you will ensure that the Legal Services Corporation receives robust funding in the FY 2022 CJS Appropriations bill to provide critical legal assistance to eligible Americans.

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Brian Fitzpatrick
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Mary Gay Scanlon
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Tom Emmer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Debbie Dingell
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